

# Working from home means softer toilet paper—and a significant toll on the environment

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With Americans spending a lot of time at home these days, more money is being spent on soft toilet paper. That may be bad news for the environment.

The kind of cushy tissue that was [sold out](#) earlier in the pandemic uses material that comes primarily from clear-cutting forests, according to the Natural Resources Defense Council. Office buildings, on the other hand, tend to use recycled fibers in their toilet paper, the group said.

“The side-effect of one crisis shouldn’t exacerbate another,” said Shelley Vinyard, an environment expert with the NRDC, which released a [report](#) Wednesday on the climate impact of toilet paper. “There’s no real reason why office tissue has to be made with recycled and the consumer tissue has to be made with virgin fiber.”

Nearly 60% of at-home toilet paper in the U.S. comes from so-called virgin material, which is sourced from Canada’s northern forests. The NRDC for years has highlighted the impact of tissue that uses non-recycled content.

In the latest study, the group handed out F grades to brands from [Procter & Gamble Co.](#), Georgia-Pacific, and [Kimberly-Clark Corp.](#)—the three largest U.S. manufacturers of toilet paper—for the environmental impact of their products.

P&G said via email that its popular Charmin brand is “sourced from responsibly-managed forests,” and that at least one tree is regrown for every one the company uses. A Georgia-Pacific representative referred to an earlier statement that said the company is committed to sustainability and that Canada in particular has regulations in place to help minimize the risk of deforestation.

## **‘Complex challenges’**

Kimberly-Clark has committed to reducing the use of virgin wood fiber from natural forests in its tissue products by 50% by 2025, said Terry Balluck, a company spokesperson. “We understand the point of view of the NRDC, and we remain committed to the ongoing dialogue with them on the complex challenges presented in their report.”

The heavy reliance on virgin fibers is releasing an “enormous Pandora’s box” of carbon emissions, said Jennifer Skene, a co-author of the NRDC report along with Vinyard. Logging in the Canadian boreal forests region, which stretches from the Yukon to Newfoundland, emits 26 million metric tons every year, the report estimates, an amount which is equivalent to the emissions produced by 5.5 million passenger vehicles.

As tissue remains one of the fastest-growing sectors in the paper industry, investments in virgin fibers will likely continue in years to come, according to the NRDC, which is headquartered in New York.